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Exploring a Labyrinth

One of the most famous labyrinths in Christian churches is the forty foot wide labyrinth set into the stone floor at Chartres Cathedral.

It is thought to have been constructed around 1200. A number of other great French cathedrals also had labyrinths but many of these have been worn away or destroyed over time.

The labyrinths were constructed as a form of pilgrimage or aid to prayer, for people who could not actually understand a spiritual journey to Jerusalem or one of the other pilgrimage routes. The labyrinth, with its folds, its sense of purpose and the reaching of a destination in the centre, made it possible for such people to enter into the spirit of pilgrimage and journey towards God through prayer.

The labyrinth is circular reminding people of the globe on which we live. The circle divides into four quadrants and the folds allow a cross to be seen. Walkers move through all the quadrants several times, walking over all the earth, as it were, before entering the central rosette space which echoes the famous rose windows of Chartres cathedral.



Part of the labyrinth pathway at Chartres

Walking the labyrinth reminds us that we are on a journey through as human beings on this our particular planet and home. The journey winds, - we cannot always see clearly where we are going to go or where we are going to end up, but the pathway is always different leading us (though we may not be able to tell) to an ultimate destination. So we may wander, but there is a path at our feet and it is taking us to the heart of a mystery: who we are and what we are doing here. What we find at the centre, at the heart of the matter, depends on what we have discovered in the course of our journey. In Chartres, the fact that the winding path is centred in a great cathedral, whose windows tell elaborate stories of what God has done, concentrates the mind on Christian spirituality and how pilgrimage prepares us to find and to meet God at journey's end.



If you would like to explore a labyrinth online you can do so at

<http://www.embody.co.uk/labyrinth/online.html>

<http://www.gratefulness.org> this site allows you to explore the Chartres labyrinth online as well as walk other labyrinths to pray and meditate your way through questions, problems or the blessings in your life.